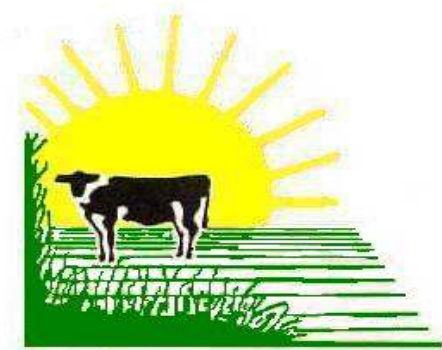


Wright County Soil & Water Conservation District

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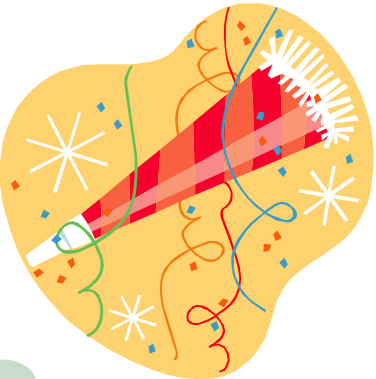
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Wright County Soil & Water Conservation District

WINTER 2008

The Wright News

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*The Wright County Soil & Water Conservation
District Board of Supervisors and Staff wish
you and yours a Safe and Rewarding 2009!*

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

OZARKS FORAGE AND LIVESTOCK CONFERENCE
MARCH 6, 2009, MANSFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER
9:00 A.M. TO 3:30 P.M.
KEYNOTE SPEAKER: KEITH CARMICHAEL, EDITOR
THE MIDWEST CATTLEMAN

SOIL TEST MEETING
FEBRUARY 12, 2009, USDA SERVICE CENTER OFFICE
1:00 P.M. AND 6:30 P.M.



Partnering for Wildlife

by B. Keith Wollard, Wright County Conservation Agent
Landowners gain assistance and equipment through the Wright County Open Land Habitat Enhancement Project.

Each year, resource agencies receive an increasing number of requests from landowners for assistance with wildlife habitat practices. Many of these requests come from folks who have purchased land for non-agricultural uses and need help obtaining equipment and technical information to carry out their wildlife enhancement projects.

Wildlife professionals have long realized that providing landowners with access to farming implements could greatly benefit wildlife populations. However, there have been obstacles. These have included funding for the purchase, storage, operation and maintenance of equipment, as well as scheduling, record keeping and other administrative duties.

In recognition of the growing need for assistance, several Wright County agencies pooled resources and ideas to see what could be accomplished. From this, a unique partnership was formed: the Wright County Open Land Habitat Enhancement Project. Partners in the project include the Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF), and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

When partners pool assets

The Wright County Open Land Habitat Enhancement Project was designed to make equipment and knowledgeable personnel available to private landowners who have a strong interest in wildlife management. These landowners have a significant impact on depressed and dwindling wildlife populations especially.

The project focuses on, but is not limited to, developing early succession habitat, which is a vital, yet often missing requirement for brood rearing and nesting of bobwhite quail, wild turkey and other small game. The lack of this type of cover is a major contributing factor in the sharp decline of bobwhite quail and a host of other wildlife species.

By combining all partners' resources, a "one-stop shop" program was developed. To date, the partnership has purchased a four-wheel drive tractor with a front-end loader, a 4x4 ATV, a brush hog, spraying equipment, broadcast seeders, offset and three-point discs, and chemical and planting materials, all to assist landowners in their habitat enhancement projects. By tapping into all partners' assets, the group has been able to provide wildlife habitat work with minimal cost and labor passed on to the landowner.

The plan goes public

As a kick-off event for the project, a Demonstration Field Day was held at the Steven Whittaker property just outside of Hartville. Attendees learned about several different early succession habitat practices, including:

- Prescribed burning, along with proper techniques of mowing and disking firebreaks.
- Light strip disking to improve brood rearing habitat for quail and turkey.
- Herbicide applications to undesirable vegetation.
- Tree and shrub plantings for food and covey headquarter areas.
- Seeding of lespedeza and other legumes.
- Planting annual grain and green browse food plots.
- Establishment of wildlife-friendly warm-season grasses and native forbs for grassland plant diversity.

The success of the Habitat Enhancement Project is evident in the strong landowner interest. Several people are on the waiting list to enter the program.

Cont'd on Pg. 3

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Wright County wildlife wins

To determine the program's impact on wildlife populations, several wildlife monitoring surveys are being conducted. Fixed-point quail whistling counts have been conducted on farms both before and after habitat practices have been carried out. Though it's still fairly early in the monitoring process (only two years in some cases), there have been positive results.

Central Wright County

A case in point is a 50-acre farm located in Central Wright County. Whistling counts and landowner surveys showed that only one covey of quail was found on the property before extensive habitat practices were carried out. The owner of the property wanted to see what could be done to increase the number of quail and rabbits on his farm.

The owner had few farming implements and was not sure how to help the wildlife on his farm. After hearing of the project from a neighbor, he decided to enroll in the Habitat Enhancement Program. Though he could not devote his entire acreage to extensive wildlife habitat work, the owner hoped that something could be done with the several small areas he was not actively farming.

Thick fescue, cedar and locust trees dominated the selected areas. Therefore, the recommended practices for the land included eradication of fescue by chemical treatment, prescribed burning, establishment of warm season grass and native forb mixtures, strip disking, legume seedings and annual grain food plots. Pasture management was also modified to favor nesting success of quail, turkey and rabbits.

In the short time since the habitat work began, counts and surveys show that the owner has gone from one covey of quail to four coveys on his 50-acre farm. He was amazed at the quick results and actually saw a covey of quail using one of the burned areas the second day after the prescribed fire. He had never before seen quail in this area. He also reports seeing a considerable increase in the number of rabbits, songbirds and other wildlife species.

Results such as these show that the key to reversing downward wildlife population trends lies in carrying out favorable land management practices that provide essential habitat. They also show that hundreds of acres of land are not needed to positively affect wildlife.

Northern Wright County

Jim Shaddy, whose 160-acre family farm is located in Northern Wright County, remembers a time when he saw coveys of bobwhite quail along most every fencerow on his property.

However, as farming practices gradually changed over the years, much of the land was converted from diverse native grass pastures to cool-season fescue. Though necessary for the farm's income, these land changes were unfavorable for quail and other wildlife. Jim began to see a dramatic decline in the bobwhite quail population, and now he rarely sees or hears quail on the farm.

Jim had wanted to make wildlife-friendly changes on the property for some time. Because he did not have all the necessary equipment, time or technical knowledge to make these changes, he was excited to hear about the Habitat Enhancement Program and how equipment and advice were being made available through the Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Jim has just begun work with the Enhancement Project and is carrying out habitat and land management practices that will favor wildlife and help return the land to what he once remembered.

As word has spread of the wildlife work being done in Wright County, the Open Land Enhancement group has been approached by several government agencies and private citizens outside Wright County who are interested in the wildlife program. The project partners are inspired by the positive results and overwhelming interest, and they hope that similar partnering projects to assist landowners can be carried out in other areas across the state.

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